



E. S. WILLARD

By WALTER PRICHARD EATON

With portrait of E. S. Willard drawn from life by JOHN CECIL CLAY,
and printed in colors as frontispiece to this magazine.



IF one familiar with the American stage for the last decade were asked to name the actors who have consistently given our public genuine pleasure of the better sort, pleasure that arises from the adequate portrayal of characters always worth portraying, he would without question mention near the front of his list Edward S. Willard, not, of course, unaware that Mr. Willard is an Englishman, but recognizing that the memory of more than ten seasons played in the United States has placed this English actor in a firm position of American admiration and regard.

That his place on the American stage was made possible is largely due to A. M. Palmer, to whom America owes so much as a manager. Mr. Willard was born in England in 1853, and first appeared on the stage at Weymouth, sixteen years later. He remained in the provinces for twelve years, once supporting the elder Sothorn in Glasgow. Then he went up to London, where he first acted in "Lights o' London." Mr. Palmer saw him play a minor part at the Princess Theater in Wilson Barrett's company, and was deeply impressed. "I felt at once that he was an actor of remarkable power, guided in what he did by a superior intellectuality," Mr. Palmer recently said, "and this impression was strengthened when upon subsequent visits to London I saw him at the Shaftesbury Theater, where he was starring, playing the leading rôles in 'The Middleman,' 'Judah,' 'Jim the Penman,' etc. I made him an offer to come to America which he accepted." Accordingly Mr. Willard appeared for the first time in this country at Palmer's Theater, New York (now Wallack's) on November 10, 1890, as *Cyrus Blenkarn* in Henry Arthur Jones' melodrama, "The Middleman."

The performance was warmly received by several of the leading critics.

It was not so well received by the public. Mr. Palmer lost heavily on the season. Nevertheless he renewed his contract for two more seasons, and his judgment was rewarded by a profit that far more than offset the loss of the first venture. It was always Mr. Palmer's fancy that Mr. Willard is more American than English in his methods of acting, and certainly the American public have come to regard him as the least alien of visitors. Since leaving Mr. Palmer's management he has managed his own tours here, and has never had an unsuccessful season. He is English to this extent, however, that he will not advertise so widely nor so craftily as American actors do. "No 'Advance Agent' "—which is as near "press agent" as the English allow themselves to get—is the motto on the business stationery for his American tours. As a result, so a well-known Broadway manager puts it, "No one knows Willard is here." To be sure, this manager is the American producer of Hall Caine's melodrama's, and his conception of publicity is doubtless perverted. But the fact remains that under a lively American management of to-day Mr. Willard could increase his annual receipts here fifty per cent. That he does not unbend from his present way is characteristic of the man and sheds light upon his limitations and his great virtues as an actor.

And what are his limitations, but still more, what are his peculiar virtues as an actor? The duty of the critic who writes with sincerity, unperturbed by the "news instinct," and, still worse, by the editorial impulse which sometimes hampers the critic for the daily press, is solely to search out what is of abiding worth in the work of an actor, what is true and his own as apart from what is inherent in the play or the age-old stock of dramatic tricks, and so

to represent this "peculiar quality of pleasure," as Pater would call it, that the reader may scent through the critic's words that charm the actor offers as his own, his inalienable contribution to dramatic art. And, largely speaking, the charm which E. S. Willard offers, his contribution to his generation, is the charm of character, of character in a double but blended sense, in its technical sense of type portrayal and in its ethical sense of estimable personal qualities made manifest to the world. Mr. Willard is a character actor and an actor of character.

Obviously something more than chance has chosen the repertoire of plays in which Mr. Willard has starred most successfully. "The Cardinal," Louis N. Barker's play, with the lovable ecclesiast of the House of the Medici as the hero; "Tom Pinch," "The Middleman," "All for Her," "The Professor's Love Story." These are plays with character parts for the leading actor to portray—that is parts which do not present a subjective mood to the audience by an objective picture. The actor may be called on to express a score of moods, of passions, of shades of emotion as the action progresses, but the final effect must be a consistent picture of character.

The magnetism of subjective appeal, the power to kindle a kindred mood in his auditor, that furrows its ineradicable scar in the brain which can never be quite the same thereafter, Mr. Willard never achieves. His *Hamlet*, many will remember, was a failure; dignified, gracious, but ponderously uninspiring. A finished character picture, consistent in every situation, worked out with great intelligence and built up by touches of tender, exquisite detail into a semblance of life that satisfies the beholder's sense of completeness and truth, he does achieve, and he achieves it as few other actors now before the American public can. As a character actor he is of the best.

But this list of his plays shows him not only as the character actor but the actor of character. And, if he is limited by being a character actor, he is still farther limited in range by the quality

of his personality; still farther limited but the gainer in charm. William Winter has described the chief person in one of Mr. Willard's dramas as of "a simple, confiding nature." The description is so true of the chief person in any one of the plays that it does not matter to which Mr. Winter referred. Limited to character parts, Mr. Willard has recognized that even within that field only a portion belongs to him, the portion where dwell the men the world may now and again play pranks upon, but heartily respects and agrees with one voice to call lovable—the *Tom Pinches* and *Cyrus Blenkarns* and *Professors* born of J. M. Barrie's shy but humor-loving muse; they, and their ilk. And that is because Mr. Willard by nature and temperament inclines to be gracious and lovely himself, not one, indeed, whom the world is likely to play pranks upon, but one whom to see is to admire for a picture of middle aged charm more urbane than the rising generation knows much about, more wholesome and sincere than the common walks of life afford. There is a fascination in the very home life of Mr. Willard in London, off Abbey Road, where his garden plot hums in summer with the sound of bees and where he devotes his leisure to the cultivation of Japanese lilies and carnations. He has an amiable weakness, too, for the poems of Swinburne, the weakness of a book collector for a rare copy of "Atalanta," with Rossetti's golden disks proudly exhibited to his friends, as well as twenty rare sets of Shakespeare and an old "Anatomy of Melancholy." Again, there was the polished dignity in his reply to an interviewer who asked him if he found it true that American audiences coarsen the art of an English actor. "The actor whose art is based on truth," he said, "will not be coarsened by any audience."

No one who has seen Mr. Willard in "The Cardinal" or "The Middleman" can have failed to feel a charm like this. It remains, a cheering memory, for days and weeks. From his undoubted limitations he gains his greatest strength and charm, the charm of character. Other actors are far more versatile, or

more stimulating to the pulse, or more appealing to the imagination; a few among them—always too few—are more profound. But it is Mr. Willard's own distinction that he possesses for his auditor above any other the charm of character, as if one should go out among the throngs of daily life and returning say, "I met such a fine, gray-haired gentleman to-day, it would do your heart good to see!"

By what methods of technique Mr. Willard keeps such characters as he presents true and consistent through the stress and tumult of often highly colored events, need not concern the seeker for his charm. Such questions, indeed, often tend to blunt the edge of enjoyment for the finished whole. Yet his voice, his chief technical weapon, is at the same time so much an indicator of his own character and a symbol of the characters he assumes that it must be mentioned. It is a wonderfully rich, melodious, organ voice, of great range and under perfect control. It is a voice that by turn you are sure was created to scan Virgil's measures, to speak a benediction, to vent a mild gentleman's slow-roused but splendid indignation and rage.

Mr. Willard has not yet become so popular, however, nor been so well re-

warded in his own country as here; he has not been accepted by London into the unique position of a London actor-manager, as have Mr. Tree or Mr. Alexander or Sir Charles Wyndham. It is only natural, therefore, grateful as he has frequently expressed himself to be toward the United States, that he should desire to win the ultimate approval of London.

He has leased the St. James Theater for the entire fall season of 1903, and with the New Year will go to another London play house. He has secured for what may be considered his mature bid for London favor a new play in verse by Stephen Phillips, based on the Biblical story of David and Bathsheba, a new comedy by "Kellet-Carew," a "discovery" of his own, as he puts it, and two new dramas by Alfred Capus, one of which will first be produced in the original in Paris next October, under the title of "The Renaissance." We in America who have enjoyed for so many seasons Mr. Willard's mellow character portrayals and the touch of his own fine nature, which together form his unique charm as an actor, would be less than kind if we did not wish him all success and a present return to our shore with the prize of that London favor as a final recommendation.

I'SE A-COMIN'

By ELLA MIDDLETON TYBOUT

*Mandy, now de stahs am shinin'
An' de yallah moon am climbin'
I'se a-comin' sho's yo' bawn;
Wotch an' wait fuh me meh baby,
Yo'se a-g'wine tuh see me maybe,
Walkin' todes yo' thu de cawn.*

*Does yo' feel dem breezes hus'lin'
Settin' all de leaves tuh rus'lin' ?
Does yo' smell de wil' grape vine?
By dat li'le brook dats tinklin'
Thu de fiahflies roun' it twinklin'
I'se a-comin', ain't it fine?*

*On'y hyah dem treefrogs callin'
Jes' bekaze de dew am fallin';
Lis'en tuh de whippo'will;
Cross dese steppin' stones so handy
I'se a-walkin' todes yo', Mandy,
Is yo' waitin' fuh me still?*

*Dat am jes de screech owl hootin'
At dem rabbits roun' him, scootin'
In an' out betwix' de cawn;
Don' git skeery, Mandy honey,
Kaze de shaddahs all looks funny,
I'se a-comin' sho's yo' bawn.*